

SENATOR FRANK R. LAUTENBERG
Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations Hearing
On
GLOBAL NUCLEAR MATERIALS
OPENING STATEMENT
Tuesday, March 28, 2006

Mr. Chairman,

Thank you for calling this hearing and giving us an opportunity to learn more about the greatest threat to our national security – nuclear materials that could be used to build weapons of mass destruction.

The report card issued by the 9/11 Commission last year gave the Bush administration a grade of “D” for its efforts to secure nuclear materials around the world.

The Commission’s report said, - QUOTE - “Countering the greatest threat to America’s security is still not the top national security priority of the President and the Congress.”

Nuclear terror threats are still out there – and they could be smuggled into our country through one of our greatest vulnerabilities: our ports.

Some nine million cargo containers enter our ports every year - almost three million in the Port of New York and New Jersey alone.

But we still inspect only five percent of these containers. Five percent. That is unacceptable given the threats we face.

I believe we need to inspect or scan all containers that enter our country. The alternative is to continue to rely on intelligence - the same intelligence that President Bush relied on in determining whether Iraq had weapons of mass destruction.

We can’t afford to be wrong again. One nuclear device smuggled into Port Newark in New Jersey could threaten the lives of 12 million Americans.

Since 1991, the U.S. has invested approximately one billion dollars a year to protect reactors in the former Soviet bloc from illegal transfer of nuclear materials.

Today, those reactors are considered relatively secure. But it is believed that almost 50 reactors in other countries still lack adequate security.

Most of them are in China, Ghana, Jamaica, Pakistan and Uzbekistan, according to a list compiled by the International Atomic Energy Agency.

There are also “research” reactors in countries hostile toward the United States, including Iran and North Korea.

Mr. Chairman, our nation can do better than a grade of “D.” We can do better than inspecting five percent of cargo containers.

The Bush administration needs to heed the warning of the 9/11 Commission, and make this a top national security priority.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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